

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents prepare their kids to follow rules?

**Q:** My daughter will start kindergarten this fall, and she's generally well behaved. Still, she needs practice following rules and directions. How can I help?

**A:** Kids this age can't handle long, complicated sets of rules. Keep things short and simple so your child can be successful. To start:

- **Decide on a few important rules.** Choose those that reflect your values most. For example, "Do what your parents ask you to do." "No hitting." "Use your 'inside voice' in the house." "Take care of belongings."
- **Explain and post rules.** It's okay if your child can't read yet. Seeing a list is a good reminder. Review the list often.
- **Follow up when rules are broken.** Don't bend the rules, or your child will learn they aren't really rules! On the other hand, notice your child's good behavior and show your pride.
- **Use play as a teacher.** Board games and active games (like Follow the Leader) reinforce the benefits of following rules and directions.



## MAKING TIME COUNT

### Family time is a worthy investment

Spending time with children isn't always easy or convenient. But the results are amazing. You may be surprised by how much the time means to your child—and how much it will mean to you. Try these simple ideas:

- **Establish new traditions.** For example, prepare breakfast with your child once a week.
- **Do simple chores.** Kids enjoy learning new things, such as how to water plants or sort clothes.
- **Watch your child play.** Notice what he enjoys. Find new and creative ways to join in.
- **Limit TV and videogames.** Choose reading, exercise, make believe and other fun pastimes instead.
- **Plan uninterrupted activities together.** Put them on your family calendar, even if it means you must rearrange your schedule to accommodate them.

Source: Alan Greene, "Spending Time With Kids," Parenting Health Center, <http://health.yahoo.com/centers/parenting/00013859>.

## BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

### Keep your child listening, thinking and responding

Few things are more important to your preschooler's development than language. Here are some things you should do with your child every day:

- **Read** aloud.
- **Ask** questions that cannot be answered with just *yes* or *no*.
- **Help** her learn new words and connect them to words she already knows.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, "Teaching Our Youngest—Developing Listening and Speaking Skills," ED.gov, [www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/page\\_pg6.html?exp=0](http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/page_pg6.html?exp=0).

## LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC

### Make music with your child

Most preschoolers are not ready for serious lessons on real musical instruments, but almost all are ready to play on instruments the two of you can make at home. Place dried macaroni or beans inside an empty metal or plastic box. Secure lid and shake!



Source: Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, "Good Times With Music and Rhythm," National Network for Child Care, [www.nncc.org/series/good.time.music.html](http://www.nncc.org/series/good.time.music.html).

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Draw responsibilities

Drawing is a good way to remind children of responsibilities. For example, ask, "How should we take care of our new puppy?" Help your child think of answers, such as "Feed her." Then have him draw a picture of himself doing that. Hang the art in a noticeable spot.



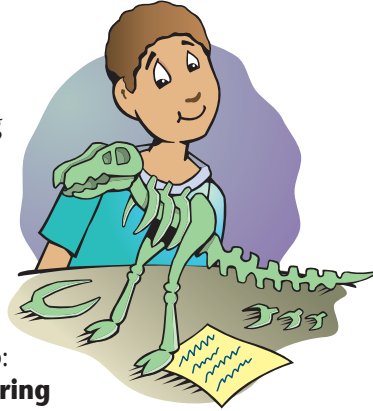
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## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Preschoolers can plan and reflect

To develop your child's higher-level thinking skills, focus on two activities—planning and reflection. These abilities are vital to your child's understanding of math, language, social skills and more. When he plans, your child will think about what he wants to do and how he'll do it. When he reflects, he'll remember what he did and evaluate it. Try to:

- **Ask your child what he plans to do during the day.** Encourage him to elaborate on his ideas. How will he accomplish them? What materials will he use?
- **Refrain from giving multiple-choice options.** Leave things open-ended so your child can pick goals that are truly his own.
- **Listen to your child's plans and write them down.** That sends the message that they're very important.
- **Set aside time for reflection each day.** Follow the same guidelines as for planning. Ask your child questions. Write down what he tells you.
- **Help your child carry plans into the next day.** Put a reminder note on a project he's working on, for example. Or keep materials in a visible spot.



Source: Ann S. Epstein, "How Planning and Reflection Enhance Young Children's Thinking Skills," *Young Children*, September 2003 (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1-800-424-2460, [www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200309/Planning&Reflection.pdf](http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200309/Planning&Reflection.pdf)).

## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you teaching coping abilities?

Children must learn to cope with sad or scary events: natural disasters, a death in the family or violence. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're teaching your child how to deal with tragedy:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you assure** your child that it's normal to be frightened or upset?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to express her feelings (using puppets, stories or pictures)?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you make** an extra effort to comfort your child?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you stick to** normal household routines as much as possible to provide stability for your child?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you monitor** your child's television viewing to make sure she doesn't see images that will further upset her?

**How did you do?** Each *yes answer means you are helping your child learn to handle traumatic events. For no answers, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"A child's life is like a piece of paper on which every passerby leaves a mark."  
—Chinese proverb*

## BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

### Keep active during winter

It's easy to become "couch-potatoes" during the winter. But your child needs to work his large *and* small muscles *every day*.

When possible, bundle up and go for a walk. Skip down to the mailbox or head for the corner store.

Inside, play games that involve exercise. Make a silly obstacle course. Race across the room. Take turns "following the leader." Don't forget to work small muscles. Draw, finger paint and mold play dough. Make puppets and put on a show.

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Pass along compliments

Most people enjoy hearing that someone has said something nice about them. Children are no different. If someone compliments your child when he's not around, let him know. Make a special point to pass on compliments about behavior he's working on: "Grandma noticed that you behaved well in the car." "Mrs. Smith told me you shared while you played with Katie." "Daddy said you cleaned up all your toys."

Source: Dandi Daley Mackall, "Catch 'Em Being Good," *Washington Families* (Washington Families, Inc., 703-318-1385, [www.washingtonfamily.com](http://www.washingtonfamily.com)).

## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Use money to teach math

Counting money will be part of your child's math curriculum at school. Here's how you can prepare her now:

- **Make** play money. Have her "buy" things from you. Show how to give the correct amount.
- **Give** your child money to pay for one item at the grocery store.



Source: Sharon M. Danes and Tammy Dunrud, "Teaching Children Money Habits for Life," University of Minnesota Extension Service, [www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/youthdevelopment/DA6116.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/youthdevelopment/DA6116.html).

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